

Message Text

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PAGE 01 TUNIS 00354 171422Z
ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-08 INR-07
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R 171217Z JAN 78
FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9588
INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY RABAT
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

UNCLAS TUNIS 0354

PARIS FOR LABATT

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, TS
SUBJ: SOCIAL DEMOCRATS SAID TO RECEIVE PERMIT TO PUBLISH
FRENCH LANGUAGE WEEKLY

REF: TUNIS 0123

1. THE SOCIAL DEMOCRAT ARABIC LANGUAGE WEEKLY,ER-RAI
(THE OPINION) IN ITS THIRD ISSUE DATED JAN 12, ANNOUNCED
THAT MINISTRY OF INTERIOR GRANTED AUTHORIZATION ON JAN 9

FOR PUBLICATION OF A SISTER FRENCH LANGUAGE WEEKLY. THIS
PAPER WILL BE CALLED "DEMOCRATIE." NO PUBLICATION DATE WAS
ANNOUNCED. THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS (EX-LOBERALS) HAD SUBMITTED
THEIR APPLICATION FOR PERMISSION TO PUBLISH DEMOCRATIE A NUMBER
OF MONTHS AGO, BUT GOVERNMENT RESPONSE WAS SLOW IN COMING.

2. IN THE MEANTIME, SOCIAL DEMOCRATS BEGAN PUBLISHING THEIR
ARABIC LANGUAGE ER-RAI ON DEC 29. THIS PAPER'S FIRST THREE
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ISSUES HAVE BEEN CRITICAL OF GOVERNMENT AND PSD, BUT IN CIR-
CUMSPECT AND GENERALLY RESPONSIBLE MANNER. JAN 12 ISSUE REPORTED
ON UGTT NATIONAL COUNCIL MEETING AND SUBSEQUENT RESIGNATION
OF ACHOUR FROM PARTY OFFICES IN SYMPATHETIC BUT SOMEWHAT
GUARDED TONES. EMPHASIS WAS MORE ON UNDERLYING REASONS FOR CON-
FRONTATION--I.E. PSD IMPOTENCE AND SHORT-SIGHTEDNESS. WE EXPECT
THAT DEMOCRATIE WILL FOLLOW SAME GENERAL APPROACH AS ER-RAI,

ALTHOUGH BOTH PAPERS WILL DOUBTLESSLY SHARPEN CRITICISM OF
PSD AND REGIME AS TIME GOES BY.

3. ER-RAI'S BACKERS TELL US THAT FIRST ISSUE SOLD ALMOST 50,000
COPIES AND THAT SALES HAVE NOW LEVELED OFF TO AROUND 30,000
PER ISSUE. PRICE IS HIGH FOR TUNISIA, 150 MILLIMES OR ABOUT
THIRTY-SEVEN CENTS, COMPARED TO ROUGHLY HALF THAT FOR GOVERNMENT
AND PARTY DAILIES. DROP FROM HIGH NUMBER OF FIRST ISSUE "CURI-
OSITY" READERSHIP WAS EXPECTED AND SOCIAL DEMOCRATS SAY THEY
ARE EXTREMELY PLEASED WITH THIS LEVEL OF PUBLIC ACCEPTANCE.
PUBLICATION OF FRENCH LANGUAGE DEMOCRATIE WILL PROBABLY CUT INTO
ER-RAI READERSHIP, BUT OVERALL EFFECT WILL BE TO INCREASE
AUDIENCE FOR SOCIAL DEMOCRATS' VIEWS, AS MANY TUNISIANS
STILL HAVE A HARD TIME WITH WRITTEN ARABIC.

4. INTERESTINGLY ENOUGH, JAN 14 ISSUE OF PSD WEEKLY MAGAZINE
DIALOGUE (WHICH CAME OUT JAN 13) MENTIONED THAT DEMOCRATIE
WOULD APPEAR SOON. COMMENTING THAT CONTENT OF THIS PAPER, AS
IS CASE WITH ER-RAI AND UGTT WEEKLY ACH-CHAAB, WOULD BE "HOSTILE
TO REGIME," DIALOGUE ASKED IF PUBLICATION OF SUCH PAPERS DID NOT
DISPROVE UGTT CHARGE CONCERNING LIMITATIONS ON FREEDOM OF
EXPRESSION IN TUNISIA.

5. THE NATIONAL UNION OF FARMERS AS WELL AS THE NATIONAL
UNION OF INDUSTRY AND COMMERCE HAVE RECENTLY BEGUN PUBLICATION
OF THEIR OWN WEEKLY NEWSPAPERS. TUNISIA'S "FOURTH ESTATE"
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OUTPUT COULD BE EVEN LARGE IN IMPROBABLE EVENT GOVERNMENT
APPROVES OTHER PUBLICATION PERMITS SAID TO BE PENDING. WE
UNDERSTAND THAT UGTT'S ACH-CHAAB WANTS TO EXPAND PUBLICATION FROM
A WEEKLY TO A DAILY BASIS AND ER-RAI NOTED IN ITS LAST ISSUE THAT
PAPER HAS RECEIVED A LETTER FROM "SECRETARY GENERAL OF TUNISIAN
COMMUNIST PARTY" STATING THAT PARTY HAS REQUESTED AUTHORIZATION
FROM GOT TO BEGIN PUBLICATION OF WEEKLY PAPER IN BOTH FRENCH
AND ARABIC. (NOTE THAT PCT IS ILLEGAL IN TUNISIA, BUT DOES
MAINTAIN VESTIGIAL ORGANIZATION ABROAD, REPORTEDLY IN PARIS.
SECRETARY GENERAL REPORTEDLY LIVES IN TUNIS, HOWEVER.)
MULCAHY

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NNN

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Disposition Approved on Date:
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Disposition Event:
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